

THE
S T A T E
OF
DEWSBURY-HOUSE,
IN YORKSHIRE;

BEING
A VINDICATION
OF THE
CONDUCT of the CONFERENCE
respecting it.

By the Rev. THOMAS COKE, LL.D.

STATE

IN SENATE

REPORT

OF THE

COMMISSIONERS

T H E
S T A T E
O F
D E W S B U R Y - H O U S E ,
Etc. Etc.

TH E grand point in contest between the Conference and the Trustees of Dewsbury, is, and has been from the beginning, “ Whether the Trustees ought to have power, “ *by themselves, and of their own-authority alone,* “ to reject any preacher sent to them by the “ Conference, or not?” The Trustees declare that this privilege has been demanded by them from the beginning, and has been granted them by Mr. Wesley; and that it ought to be granted them in justice. These are the two grand hinges on which the argument turns: let us then examine them in the spirit of candour, and in the fear of the Lord.

The first point to be inquired into, is, Whether this privilege has been demanded by the Trustees from the beginning, and granted to them by Mr. Wesley, or not?

When the building of the preaching-house was in contemplation, that eminently useful and eminently pious man Mr. Valton was the as-

sistant of the Dewsbury Circuit. And the transactions which passed in this infancy of the business, I will give in Mr. Valton's own words, from a manuscript of his own, which I have now before me :

“ When a new house was proposed to be
 “ built at Dewsbury, by the advice of Mr.
 “ Heald and the other Trustees, I utterly re-
 “ fused taking any step towards it, unless they
 “ would consent that it should be settled accord-
 “ ing to the Conference Plan. After consult-
 “ ing together upon the subject, it was agreed,
 “ that Mr. Wesley should be requested to al-
 “ low two or three trivial alterations in the
 “ Conference Deed. Accordingly a letter was
 “ wrote by Mr. Heald to Mr. Atlay, request-
 “ ing him to use his influence with Mr. Wes-
 “ ley to obtain that concession. Mr. Wesley
 “ acceded to their proposals; and Mr. Heald
 “ received advice of the same by a letter from
 “ Mr. Atlay. Having received this intelligence
 “ from Mr. Heald, I then preached a sermon
 “ preparatory to my going about to solicit sub-
 “ scriptions. After sermon, I took down the
 “ names of several who subscribed very hand-
 “ somely towards a new house. After this I
 “ spent near two days in going about Hanging
 “ Heaton, Chidfit, and Earls Heaton, to col-
 “ lect subscriptions for the same purpose. God
 “ gave us favour in the eyes of the people, and
 “ we found them indeed most cheerful contri-
 “ butors. After this we had a difficulty started
 “ concerning a proper place to build the house
 “ upon. One place seemed most suitable, but
 “ we feared that the church-bells would be an
 “ inter-

“ interruption to us. Objections were also
 “ made to the other place. I then proposed
 “ that three or four of us should go to prayer,
 “ and intreat the Lord to direct us, by a lot,
 “ which place we should fix upon. Accord-
 “ ingly this was done, and a general satisfaction
 “ appeared in every countenance. Prepara-
 “ tions were then made for the execution of this
 “ gracious design. The foundation was laid;
 “ and I preached upon the spot to a serious con-
 “ gregation. All this was done upon a full
 “ and general conviction and consent, that the
 “ house was to be settled on the Conference
 “ Plan, excepting the trivial alterations con-
 “ sented to by Mr. Wesley. However, as I
 “ was removed soon after; and being, as I
 “ supposed, secure as to a proper deed, from
 “ the words of such pious and respectable cha-
 “ racters, I took no more thought about it,
 “ but left the accomplishment of it to my
 “ worthy successor, Mr. Broadbent. That it
 “ was the plain, manifest sense and meaning of
 “ Mr. Heald, and the Trustees that attended
 “ our meeting, that the house should be so
 “ settled, I aver before God the Judge of all
 “ men. I appeal to Mr. Brown, the preacher:
 “ I appeal to the consciences of Mr. Heald,
 “ Mr. Bennet, and James Blackburn, espe-
 “ cially! And, above all, I appeal to the Most
 “ High God, who will soon sit in judgment on
 “ our souls, for the truth of what I have ad-
 “ vanced; and if my oath will be more weighty
 “ than my word, I will at any time confirm
 “ this declaration before a magistrate. As I
 “ have spoke the truth, so help me God.

“ JOHN VALTON.”

The principal question is, Whether the alterations mentioned in Mr. Valton's memorial include a power invested in the Trustees to reject a preacher on their own judgment and determination alone, or not? This will be cleared up by Mr. John Atlay's letter to Mr. Heald, which is referred to in the memorial; a copy of which now lies on my table, and is as follows: *viz.*

" London, Feb. 23, 1784.

" My dear Sir,

" I have this morning been with Mr. Wesley, and have laid your letter before him; he is not only willing, but *desires*, it may be inserted in your deed, that if ever the Conference, or preacher, or preachers, appointed by Conference, refuse or neglect to provide a preacher for your chapel for three or four Sundays, then the Trustees shall have it in their own power to call one whom they please, and the power of nomination shall be theirs in future.

" If any preacher appointed to serve your chapel should be proved guilty of immorality, the Trustees shall have a power to reject him; and if the Conference does not send another to fill up his place, you shall have a power to call one to do it.

" JOHN ATLAY."

" If any preacher appointed to serve your chapel should be *proved* guilty of immorality." Observe, first, the whole power of rejection is confined to *immorality*. But, secondly, who are to *prove* him guilty? Has not every man, when accused, a right to an *impartial* trial? And can the trial be *impartial*, when the same persons

persons are accusers, jury, judges, and executioners? Can any process be more absurd, more inconsistent with the essence of justice, than this? And can it be supposed that it could ever enter into the mind of so wise a man as Mr. Wesley, to accede to a proposal so contrary to every idea of law and equity? But I have been informed, by good authority, that in a subsequent letter of Mr. Wesley's to the Trustees of Dewsbury, he declares who are to be the judges, observing in an interlineation that the preacher must be tried before *assistant-preachers*, meaning preachers who assist him in the superintendency of the circuits. But the copy of this letter has been lost.

However, Mr. Wesley's letter to Mr. Heald, dated the 30th of July 1788 (or within a few days, more or less, of that time), demonstrates in the clearest manner, that he did not from the first to the last change his sentiments, but was clearly of opinion that the preachers ought not to be judged by the Trustees, but by the Conference, or (in the intervals of Conference) by the neighbouring assistants.

But you may object, did not Mr. Wesley expressly give up the point, when he wrote by Mr. A. and in Mr. A.'s letter, to the Trustees during the Conference? If the letter were considered without any of the attendant circumstances, I grant this would really have been the case: but Mr. Wesley declared in a very solemn manner in the public Conference, "that his sentiment was not altered, that he had not taken the letter in the sense Mr. A. designed he should, and that Mr. A. had drawn him into the signing of that letter, by taking advantage of the
hurry

hurry of business in which he was engaged during the Conference." These words, or words exactly to the same purport, did Mr. Wesley solemnly use in the public Conference. And no person who is thus *drawn in*, is obliged to comply with any of the consequences which such treatment has brought upon him. Indeed Mr. A. has acted in such a manner, that I have no doubt but his conduct *alone* has occasioned all the evils which are or may be produced by the unhappy disputes which have arisen in Dewsbury.

But I now hasten, in the second place, to consider the merits of the cause, as it stands related to justice and equity. And I am bold to advance, that whatever engagements, negotiations, or agreements, might be pleaded (if any such existed) on one side of the question—if justice and equity declared for the other, christianity and morality must be quite out of the question, if the latter did not prevail on a clear and full investigation of the subject.

Let us, then, again resume the consideration of that important hinge, on which the argument chiefly turns— "Is it equitable, in this or any case of a judicial nature, that the same persons should be accusers, jury, judges, and executioners?" For this is the very power which the Trustees require.

I have perused books on the laws of nations, on the civil and municipal laws of various countries, on the ecclesiastical laws of various churches, but never met with a single instance of such barefaced tyranny and injustice as this requisition implies; except in the histories of
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the Popish Inquisition. And can the God of Justice require submission to such a demand? Or has any man upon earth a just authority to oblige any other man, or set of men, to submit to such tyranny? Is it possible that there can be many in this tolerating, improved age, who, on a full view of the subject, will justify any attempt that can be made to establish such a law? But I forbear, and proceed to a second argument, *viz.* the dreadful consequences which would necessarily ensue from the establishment of such a rule in respect to the cause of religion.

1. It would entirely cut the sinews of Christian discipline. What assistant would dare to exercise strict discipline towards those Trustees (or their friends), who had full power to expel him in an instant, and perhaps cast a blot on his character as long as he lived? Or if the assistant had fortitude sufficient to be faithful, how dreadful might be the consequences? He might immediately be deprived of the opportunity of exercising the dispensation of the Gospel committed to him, till a proper vacancy happened in the connection. And how grievous to a Christian minister the loss of even a month of his short life would be, is known only to those who burn for the salvation of souls; not to enumerate the many temporal inconveniences attendant on his sudden expulsion, both to himself and his family (if he had one).

2. His doctrines, if there be any difference, either at present or hereafter, through change of sentiment, between him and the Trustees, must be squared according to their views; or,
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from the nature of man, the same painful consequences which are enumerated above, would necessarily ensue.

But, 3. what proves to a demonstration that the Trustees themselves are sensible of the injustice of their own proceedings, is the offer which Mr. A. has declared, in my own hearing, the Trustees of Dewsbury have made him, *viz.* "That he shall have any security he is pleased to desire, both in respect to his salary and his continuance among them." This Mr. A. has declared, not only in my hearing, but in the hearing of some of the most respectable characters that are now among the Methodists in London; who, if necessary, might be produced. The Conference wants nothing more than the Trustees have offered Mr. A.; nay, only half as much. They desire no security in respect to salary; they only want to be legally assured, that the preachers they send shall not be expelled by the Trustees, without being first *proved* guilty by proper judges; but not by those who would be accusers, jury, judges, and executioners—the most improper judges under Heaven. But let us look a little closer into the conduct of Mr. A.

For upwards of twenty years, he has been serving God, by endeavouring, in his sphere of action, to unite God to man, and men to men; and now, for the little remainder of his state of probation, he is going to draw forth the cloven foot, and with Satan to *divide* to the utmost reach of his influence.

"But he has promised the Trustees of Dewsbury to go." And if I promised to murder,
ought

ought I to murder? If I promise to do that which is contrary to justice, brotherly love, and every tender tie which should bind man to God, and man to man, am I obliged to fulfil it? Indeed I ought to weep before God for so rash, so criminal a promise, but cannot be obliged to fulfil an engagement which militates against every thing that is good.

“ O that the God of mercy may blast all the
 “ designs of Ahitophel, and bring all his coun-
 “ sels to nought: yea, that he may bind the
 “ first author of this evil, the Devil, and say to
 “ him, *thus far shalt thou go, and no farther:*
 “ That he may keep united, in one compact
 “ body, that faithful Company of Preachers,
 “ who are leavening, with astonishing rapidity,
 “ these kingdoms with the Spirit of the Gospel
 “ — who are breaking forth to the right hand
 “ and to the left, and who are calling in the
 “ heathen world, and hastening the fulness of
 “ the Gentiles: May the God of all grace
 “ perfectly unite them, and keep them united,
 “ by the cords of divine love and affection,
 “ till they have borne a testimony for Jesus in
 “ every corner of this benighted earth, and
 “ brought all the world to the unity of the
 “ knowledge of the Son of God.”

So prays, most ardently,

THOMAS COKE.

LONDON,
 Sept. 5, 1788.

John Farrer 1789

John Farrer 1793

John Farrer 1799